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**THE THEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE**



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# Theology of the Future

AND OTHER BRIEF ESSAYS

BY

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE short papers on religious questions in this Booklet were originally published in the form of Leaflets, chiefly for circulation through the post in answer to inquiries made respecting the principles and opinions of Unitarians.

They are now issued in response to requests that are frequently made for a brief exposition of Unitarian Christianity. The writers are responsible for their own way of stating their views, and the editor has not sought to bring them into conformity.

Perhaps during the present controversy in connection with the London School Board, this little volume may prove helpful to those who wish to know what these Unitarians, so much spoken against, really have to say on some of the great problems of religious thought and life.

London, *January*, 1894.



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# THE THEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE.

BY JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE, D.D.

THE theology of the future will dwell on something else than the five points of Calvinism; and I have thought it well to consider the counterparts of this ancient system in five points of the coming theology. Let us endeavour to see what they will be.

## The Fatherhood of God.

I believe the first point of doctrine in the theology of the future will be the *Fatherhood of God*. The essence of this is the love of the father for his children; but fatherly love is a wise love, a firm love and a pure love, which seeks the best good of the child. Thus this idea of fatherhood includes that of the holiness, the truthfulness and the justice of God; in a word, all the divine attributes.

The justice of God as a father is not, as in the old theology, an abstract justice, which

has no regard to consequences. God's justice is only another form of mercy; it is the wise law which brings good to the universe, and is a blessing to every creature.

Jesus has everywhere emphasised this truth that God is a father. We find it pervading the gospels and colouring all his teaching. We find it already in the Sermon on the Mount, which tells us that we are to let our light shine, not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify our Father in Heaven; that we are to love our enemies, that we are to be like our Heavenly Father, who loves his enemies and makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.

Jesus tells us that when we pray we are to pray to our Father, not to an infinite power, or abstract justice, or far-off sovereignty. We are to look up out of our sin and sorrow and weakness, not to an implacable law, but to an infinite and inexhaustible tenderness, and we are to forgive others because our Father in Heaven forgives us. We are not to be anxious, remembering that our Heavenly Father feeds the little birds of the air. We are to pray, confident that our Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him. Thus the idea of the

Divine Fatherhood pervades the earliest as it fills the latest teachings of Jesus.

### The Brotherhood of Man.

The second point of doctrine in the new theology will be, I think, *the Brotherhood of Man*.

If men are children of the same father, then they are all brethren. If God loves them all, they must all have in them something loveable. If he has brought them here by his providence, they are here for some important end. Therefore we must call no man common or unclean; look down upon none; despise none; but respect in every man that essential goodness which God has put into the soul, and which he means to be at last unfolded into perfection.

As from the idea of the Fatherhood of God will come all the pieties, so from that of the Brotherhood of Man will proceed all the charities. This doctrine is already the source of missions, philanthropies, reforms, and all efforts to seek and save those who are surrounded by evil. It leads men to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to teach the

blind, to soothe the madness of delirium, to diffuse knowledge, and to preach glad tidings to the poor. This doctrine of the Brotherhood of Man, when fully believed, will be the source of purer moralities and nobler charities.

### The Leadership of Jesus.

The third point of doctrine in the new theology will be, as I think, the *Leadership of Jesus*.

Christ is our leader, and in following him we follow his mind, his heart, his spirit—the spirit of his words, the spirit of his life. If we know the mind of Christ in regard to any truth or duty, we have what is satisfactory, convincing, substantial. He himself must be the chief source of knowledge in regard to the essence of his gospel. The church may be divided as to its belief, but if we have the mind of Christ that is enough. We can rest in that, and be perfectly contented.

The simplest definition of a Christian is one who follows Christ. This was Jesus' own definition, 'My sheep hear my voice, and follow me.' 'I am the way, and the truth,



and the life.' 'Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden.' When Mary sat at his feet and heard his words, he said that she had chosen the good part, and had done the one thing needful.

### Salvation by Character.

The fourth point of the new theology will be *Salvation by Character*.

Salvation means the highest peace and joy of which the soul is capable. It means heaven here and heaven hereafter. This salvation has been explained as something outside of us—some outward gift, some outward condition, place or circumstance. We speak of going to heaven as if we could be made happy solely by being put into a happy place. But the true heaven is a state of the soul. It is inward goodness. It is Christ formed within. It is the love of God in the heart, going out into the life and character.

The first words which Jesus spoke indicated this belief. The poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of heaven. The pure in heart already see God. 'This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' He who has the faith which Jesus possessed, has eternal life abiding in him. The water that Jesus gives becomes a spring of water within the soul, 'springing up into everlasting life.' Do not look for an outward heaven, saying, 'Lo ! here,' or 'Lo ! there'—'for the kingdom of heaven is within you.'

When we come to study the words of Jesus as we now study human theologies, we shall find that he identifies goodness with heaven, and makes Character the essence of Salvation. And when we see that spiritual tastes and habits are not to be acquired in an hour, and perceive that all outward professions, prayers, and sacraments avail nothing unless the heart is pure, a new motive will be added to increase the goodness of the world. Character will then be the fruit of Christian faith to an extent never before realised.

### Continual Progress.

The fifth point of doctrine in the new theology will, as I believe, be the *Continuity of Human Development* in ALL WORLDS, or

the *Progress of Mankind* onward and upward FOR EVER.

Progress is the outward heaven, corresponding to the inward heaven of character. The hope of progress is one of the chief motives to action. Men are contented, no matter how poor their lot, so long as they can hope for something better. And men are discontented, no matter how fortunate their condition, when they have nothing more to look forward to.

The old theology laid no stress on progress here or progress hereafter. The essential thing was conversion; that moment passed, the object of life was attained. A man converted on his death-bed, after a life of sin, was supposed to be as well prepared for heaven as the man who had led a Christian life during long years. There was no hint given of further progress after heaven should be reached, but eternity was to be passed in perpetual thanksgiving, or in perpetual enjoyment of the joys of paradise.

Such, however, was not the teaching of Jesus. The servant in the parable who earned two pounds was made ruler over two cities; he who earned five pounds had the

care of five cities. And this accords with all we see and know ; with the long process of geological development by which the earth became fitted to be the home of man ; with the slow ascent of organised beings from humbler to fuller life ; with the progress of society from age to age ; with the gradual diffusion of knowledge, the advancement of civilisation, the growth of free institutions, and the continual attainment of higher conceptions of God.

The one fact which is written on nature and human life is the fact of progress ; and this must be accepted as the purpose of the Creator. He who made this world so lovely will make the other world as lovely, and as full of all that can contribute to our education and progress ; THERE, as here, what a man soweth he will reap ; THERE, as here, will be found an infinite variety of occupation, employment, discipline ; enough to know, enough to do, enough to love. God who has made this earth with such boundless provision for us ; who has spread such a majestic and tender beauty over all nature ; who has filled sky and sea, air and earth, with such harmonies of form and colour, such melodies of woods and winds and waters ;

will open around us THERE a still more sublime scenery, a still more lovely nature, under the same great Providence, the same all-blessing Love.

‘ We ask for peace, O Lord !

Thy children ask thy peace ;

Not what the world calls rest,

That toil and care should cease ;

That through bright sunny hours

Calm life would fleet away,

And tranquil night should fade

In smiling day—

It is not for such peace that we would pray.

‘ But give thy peace, O Lord !

To toil while others sleep,

To sow with loving care

What other hands shall reap—

To lean on thee, entranced,

In calm and perfect rest,—

Give us *that* peace, O Lord !

Divine and blest,

Thou keepest for those hearts which love thee  
best.’

Such will be the Theology of the Church of the Future, which will be emancipated from ritualism, dogmatism and sectarianism, and possess continually more and more of the mind and heart of Christ Jesus.

## A PLEA FOR UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY.

By REV. W. COPELAND BOWIE.

**I**F anyone honestly believes that his particular views of Religion are truer and more helpful than those which are current around him, it is his duty to do everything in his power to spread this higher and purer Gospel. Unitarians believe that their views are better fitted to supply the religious needs of men than those which find expression in orthodox books and pulpits. They have found strength and inspiration in Unitarian Christianity, and they are desirous that others should know more about it, that they also may be strengthened and inspired.

We are often told that no system of Religion can touch the hearts of men unless it is simple, trustworthy, and hopeful in its character, and also tends to draw out what is highest and best in human nature. I agree with this opinion ; and I believe that

Unitarian Christianity fulfils these conditions better than any other faith.

Let me try to briefly summarise the great truths for which we stand.

### God.

We are not bewildered by Trinitarian dogmas respecting God's person and nature. We are content to hold the faith which Jesus held—a faith which finds its echo in our own highest thoughts and purest feelings. We look up to God as the Father, Friend, and Helper of every human being,—a God who regards not idle words or vain professions, but who is always ready and willing to receive and bless all who sincerely love and trust him.

We hold that the manifestations of his presence may be seen in the world to-day, as clearly as they were two thousand, or six thousand years ago. We believe that he spoke to pure and faithful souls in olden times; we also believe that he speaks now to all who will listen to his voice. We believe that all who seek him will find, in his Fatherly love and wisdom, comfort in their sorrow, and strength in their weakness.



We do not pretend to know all about God. There are problems we cannot solve, there are mysteries we cannot unravel. We are content to accept the light and guidance which have been revealed to us in the works of nature, in the thoughts and deeds of the wise and good, and in the silent experiences of our own souls. We are prepared to wait patiently, and to work faithfully, until he shall see fit to reveal himself more perfectly to our vision.

### Jesus.

We attach little importance to the stories of the supernatural birth of Jesus, his miraculous achievements, and his bodily resurrection. We interpret the Gospel narratives reverently, yet reasonably. We there find Jesus portrayed as the great religious reformer of his age and country—the unsparing opponent of priestly assumption, the eloquent defender of the poor and the down-trodden, the generous uplifter of the sinful, the determined foe of every form of narrowness and bigotry, of selfishness and tyranny; the evangelist of a gospel of liberty and fraternity, of peace and love: the

Teacher, in short, who shows us what our humanity is capable of becoming by a wise and faithful devotion to duty, and by a calm and reverent trust in God.

We reverence Jesus on account of the earnest, noble life he lived, on account of the pure and helpful things he taught, on account of the brave, unselfish death he died. We call Jesus the prophet of humanity, because in him human nature is seen at its best, and because his faith in God the Father, and in man the son and brother, is still the highest and best expression of religion we possess.

### **Human Nature.**

We look upon man as a responsible being, answerable for his own character, and possessing the power of making or marring his own destiny. We hold, with Jesus, that every human being is a child of God. Everyone possesses some seed or germ of goodness in his nature. In common with all Christian men and women, we contemplate with pain and grief our own failings and short-comings; we see in the world around us many poor, mean, and vicious lives; but yet we persist in holding

the faith of Jesus, that there is no heart so black and hard, no soul so utterly vile and depraved, but that some lingering traces of affection and trust are left : it is the mission of Religion to touch and quicken this element of goodness : this is what we mean by *Salvation*.

We are prepared to stand or fall by what the mind of man discovers to be true, by what the conscience decides to be right, by what the affections and aspirations of the soul proclaim to be highest and best. We hold that our intellectual, moral, and spiritual gifts are God-given ; and we believe that the truest service we can render him is to make a faithful use of these gifts.

### The Bible.

We regard the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, contained in the Old and New Testaments, as the noblest and most helpful collection of sacred literature in the world. We do not imagine that God's words are all there, nor that all the words there are his. We are not disturbed by the false science, the incorrect history, the questionable morality that appear in some parts of the Bible.

When the intellectual and moral life of the times during which the writers lived is taken into account, these mistakes and defects ought to occasion no surprise.

We treasure the patriarchal stories, because, in spite of all their rudeness or coarseness, they are so simple, pathetic, and life-like. We delight to read the prophetic words of an Amos, a Micah, an Isaiah, because we see reflected in these writings the spiritual aspirations of pure and fervent souls. We ponder over the Gospel narratives, around which so many tender associations cling : we love them because they tell us about Jesus, because they inspire us with a generous faith in human goodness, and help us to feel the nearness and tenderness of the Father.

### The Future Life.

With our faith in the love and Fatherly care of God, it is only natural to expect that we should take a simple and hopeful view of the Future Life. We do not—we cannot—we dare not—believe that our heavenly Father will cast off any one of his children utterly and for ever. We teach that the character

of our future life will depend on the use we have made of our gifts and our opportunities here on earth. There can be no arbitrary selections with a just and righteous God.

We rejoice in believing that the most wayward, sinful child will at last be brought to the Father's Home. We do not know how long it may take to purify the souls of the foul and vicious; but with all our hearts we cling to the hope that God intends every human creature to become noble and generous, and not to remain for ever base and selfish. In the ultimate triumph of truth over falsehood, of goodness over wickedness, we place the most unqualified confidence. Our faith in the justice and goodness of God excludes belief in a malicious and powerful devil, and an everlasting hell.

### Our Plea.

We believe that these views of religion are in close sympathy with the best thought and feeling of our times. They are in harmony with Christianity as Jesus taught it. They form a simple, reliable, and hopeful Gospel. They are capable of exercising and developing the highest and best qualities of our

humanity—capable, we believe, of meeting the religious needs of hundreds and thousands who are at present outside all the churches.

It is our duty to God, to conscience, and to our fellow-men, to use every means in our power to increase and extend the influence of this Religion. Faithfulness and devotion on the part of those who are already with us would soon win over many who, on account of ignorance or prejudice, are now against us.

The world stands in need of a gospel of goodness, of love, of joy, of peace, and of justice,—a gospel that will sanctify all life and effort ; a gospel which will harmonise all that man's mind knows to be true with all that his conscience declares to be right, and with all that his spiritual nature feels to be holiest and most God-like. It is such a gospel that Unitarians desire to proclaim in their Sunday services, and to exhibit, as best they can, in their daily lives.

## WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

By REV. JOHN PAGE HOPPS.

**T**HIS is an important question. It is perhaps the most important question anyone could ask. But before we answer it we must ask two others,—*What is it to be saved?* and, *What are we to be saved from?*

Salvation is deliverance. Salvation to the drowning man is to be rescued from the water. Salvation to the diseased man is the curing of his disease. Salvation to the lost man is the finding of the right road. The soul's Salvation is salvation from ignorance and sin, and from hurtful thoughts of God; though, as a rule, people talk only of Salvation from Hell.

It is very little we know about Hell, though there are some who seem to know all about it, and who can even tell us who are on their way thither. But, whatever Hell is, it is an *effect*; and the wise will, therefore look for the cause. Now the real Hell is in the spirit-

self. It we can save from *that*, we need fear no other. Save your struggling brother from his ignorance, his fear, his miserable moral weakness, his cruel poisoning sin ; lift him up, give him better thoughts, brighter ideas, purer affections ; teach him to love God ; and he is saved. I say he '*is* saved,' saved *now*, for such an one has entered God's beautiful kingdom of heaven on earth, and is a pilgrim to the skies. We are too apt to think of Salvation as only a deliverance from punishment. Would to God men would see that they have more to fear from themselves than from Him ! We shall never need to be saved from God : we shall for ever need to be brought near unto Him.

There are two things we chiefly need to be saved from :—the rule of sin, and hurtful thoughts of God.

'*The rule of sin*' is the cause of all our misery, darkness, and dread. We ought to think less of escaping from punishment, and more about escaping from the thing that deserves punishment. We ought to trouble less about Hell *hereafter*, and be more anxious about sin *now* ; for we may be sure that there is only one road to Hell, and that is the road of sin. Let a man escape from



*that*, and turn his face to the good, and he need never think of Hell. For him there is no such place.

From '*hurtful thoughts of God*' we also need to be saved. God is our Heavenly Father, and it is a shame to present Him to the people as a hard and cruel Ruler. And yet even in our own day, enlightened as we are, clergymen often try to frighten poor folks by telling them of a dreadful Being who keeps an eternal Hell of fire into which He will plunge all who happen to stumble on the wrong creed or who go to the wrong Church. What a wonderful thing it is that men can say such dishonouring things of God! and what a wonderful thing it is that any one can be brought to believe them! Let us get rid of this Paganism and begin to be Christians: let us cease to tremble before an angry Sovereign, and learn to rejoice before a loving Father: let us be in bondage no more to the dreadful idea that a wise and holy God will punish His children in fire for their opinions or their want of opinions, and let us come to the glorious liberty of the children of God who know that all are the objects of His care, that *all* who seek His face shall find it, whatever may be their ideas

on the way, and that even in the life hereafter, He will never cruelly turn His face from any who cry to Him for light and help.

*How then can we be saved?* First, by seeing that sin is a tyrant, that it has no right to rule and darken and poison us. Next, by seeing that God is *not* the dreadful Being men have pictured Him, but a good and wise and holy Being who is waiting every hour to help us conquer our sins when we desire to escape from them. Then, by lifting up the eyes to see all that is beautiful and good, and striving for that with all the heart.

Jesus Christ came to help us in all this. He came to help us to understand our sins that we might hate and conquer them; to know God that we might love and trust Him; and to see all that is Godlike that we might desire it and strive for it.

What think you, then, of these things—friends and fellow-travellers? Does it look reasonable that Salvation is this plain and intelligible thing; or is it something unnatural and mysterious, that no one can either explain or understand? Salvation is not something that depends upon Church, or creed, or priest; it does not depend upon

where you worship, or what you believe, or how you have been baptized ; it is a deeper thing than all that,—a thing of the affection, the conscience, and the soul ; and if anyone really hates sin and strives to please God, he is on the road to Heaven. Priests may tell him he will be lost unless he receives their particular sacraments, and others may tell him he will be lost unless he believes in their particular creeds, but the well-instructed and really free will be too wise to believe them : they will know that we are acceptable to God, not for the Church we attend, or the creed we hold, but for what we love, and what we seek, and what we *are*.

Perhaps this leaflet may be read by or to some poor sick person,—to some poor soul who has perchance been disturbed by the priest's bad news of an angry God and an eternal Hell : if so, I will say to such,—*Do not believe it*. Do not be afraid of God, and let no one make you afraid of Him. God is *not* an angry God : He will *not* punish you for your mistakes, and He will not punish you for ever at all. He is a just, a wise, a merciful, and a holy God, and he will take into account your opportunities, and judge the heart : and if, in the world to which you

are going, He permits you to suffer at all, it will be for your good,—to purify you, to teach you, to make you fit for a life of progress in what is pure and beautiful and good : but in no case will he suffer you to be wretched and tormented for ever : for He is the Lord and King of the Universe ; and He will one day triumph even over Sin, and bring all his wandering children to his feet.

Do not be driven from this precious faith, that the God with whom you have to do is a God of perfect justice, wisdom, pity, truth, and love, and that He will so deal with *all* his children in all his worlds as that all at last shall say,—‘*He hath done all things well.*’ Cling to this faith as for your life ; and, when all its light has dawned upon you, you will have no more need to ask the question—‘What must I do to be saved?’

## UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY EXPLAINED.

By REV. R. A. ARMSTRONG, B.A.

WE Unitarians have long been accustomed to be misrepresented and misunderstood by those who are more eager to condemn the views of their neighbours than to understand what they really are, and we are well aware that many have been taught to believe evil things of us.

Our usual way of meeting such misunderstanding and misrepresentation is to go on quietly with our work, trying to think and speak truly and to help on all movements that make for the good of the people, and worshipping the Heavenly Father according to our consciences. But sometimes it becomes a plain duty to speak out and to insist on explaining what the faith of Unitarian Christians really is.

## What Unitarian Christianity is.

What then is this Unitarian Christianity which you are warned against as if it were a sort of spiritual plague?

Unitarian Christianity teaches that God is our Father, full of love for all of us. It learns from Jesus that the Father listens to our prayers and watches over us with even more tender care than over the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

It learns from Jesus too, that however important it may be to have correct views concerning religious matters, it is much more important to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. For he says that these are the first two commandments, and that there is no other whatever that is greater than these.

It learns from Jesus, also, that the way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is, not merely to hold a correct theology or to receive any outward sacraments, but to 'be converted and become as little children,'—simple-hearted, loving, pure.

Unitarian Christianity teaches that God, our Father, claims us all as children, and

that when Jesus speaks of himself as God's Son, he means us all to remember that we are God's children too, though unhappily we have stained our sonship and daughterhood with many unworthy thoughts and deeds.

Unitarian Christianity loves the Parable of the Prodigal Son, because it shows so clearly and so beautifully the love and forgiveness of God, and with what tender pity he looks on us when we have sinned.

Unitarian Christianity believes that God speaks to his children now as truly as he did to the Prophets of old and to Jesus Christ, comforting, strengthening, enlightening them. Conscience itself is his holy voice.

Unitarian Christianity sees in Jesus Christ a supremely beautiful life and character, a marvellous inspiration for us all, an ideal after which we may strive ; and it loves to think of him as our Elder Brother, of the same nature as ourselves.

Unitarian Christianity does not believe that God will plunge any of his children into everlasting woe. Such a thought of God is a contradiction of his Fatherhood. He is leading us all, by different ways, towards the pure and holy life for which he brought us into being.

These ideas are so different from what other churches often teach as the true Christianity that you may well wonder how, with the same Bible in our hands, we can possibly have arrived at conclusions so contrary to each other.

Will you bear with me while I try to give you an outline of some of my own thoughts about the Bible and Christ and God?

### **How the Old Testament grew.**

More than three thousand years ago there came wandering from Egypt towards the land of Canaan certain rude warrior tribes under a great and noble leader whose name was Moses.

In the spirit of this man Moses, great and wonderful thoughts were stirring. Not only did he set himself to weld the mixed peoples whom he was leading from captivity into a compact nation, but he sought to direct their thoughts to a God of righteousness who was called Jehovah, and in the name of this God he gave them certain laws of conduct which were an immense advance on anything the world had known before. At first, indeed, the Israelites thought of Jehovah as being



simply the God of their own tribes and of the lands over which they extended their sway, and they did not doubt that the surrounding tribes had their Gods too, who were just as real, though far from being so holy. But by slow degrees the leading minds among the Israelites thought out the great and glorious doctrine that there is but one God of all the world, and that all the world shall some day worship him and him alone. There arose among them a series of men known to us as Prophets, in whose hearts the pure spirit of God so worked that they came to have wonderful insight into spiritual truth and to proclaim the moral law and the holiness of God with fearless power, alike to the people and the kings.

The Old Testament is the literature which arose out of this national history. It reflects all the stages of the struggle. It is written by a great variety of men separated by many hundreds of years from one another ; and as each man wrote in accordance with the thought and knowledge of his own time, the religious utterances of some are naturally far purer and more sublime than those of others. It would be wrong to bind ourselves by every expression of all these writers ; but it is im-

possible to mistake the magnificent religious development which this literature unfolds, and there are hundreds of passages in Prophet and in Psalm which to this day are a delight to us, comforting and strengthening us in the sorrow and battle of life with the sense of the near presence of that God who pitieth them that fear him 'like as a father pitieth his children.'

### What the New Testament is.

When the Old Testament closes, there is a period of silence unbroken by the voice of any mighty men of God till the cry of the Baptist is heard by the Jordan waters and the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, in all its gracious beauty, breaks on our sight. How wonderful he is ! How simple and beautiful his teachings ! How touching and inspiring his own life ! And yet a little study shows us that even within the New Testament there are different ideas about him.

Let us take first the exquisite Beatitudes in the beginning of the fifth chapter of *Matthew*, or the series of Parables in the middle of *Luke*. No man had ever spoken

like that before. No wonder the common people heard him gladly! They felt in his very words and tones an 'authority,' which they had never felt in the priests or the scribes of their own day.

See how he loved little children, how tender he was to women, even when they had sinned grievously, what joy he had in the birds and the flowers, how he was ever seeking his Father, and how he longed to make the people understand that God was not far off but very near, and that his kingdom is in the inward heart.

All this is exquisitely simple. A pure heart understands it all at once, and feels how true it is. And if a man realises it and believes it in the bottom of his heart, his life is purified and sanctified and full of gladness. Whatever else Jesus taught, he certainly taught this, and cared more for it than for any theological dogmas or outward sacraments.

But while the picture of Jesus in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* is so clear and simple, in other parts of the New Testament we find other ideas about him mixed up with these, and sometimes even overshadowing them.

Thus in the fourth of our Gospels, that

which bears the name of *John*, the writer does not describe Jesus as talking in such simple language. The writer gives us long discourses from the lips of Jesus, which, though they are full of the spirit of love, yet are harder to understand. Jesus indeed still says quite plainly, 'My Father is greater than I.' Yet the writer evidently has a somewhat different idea of him from that which the earlier Evangelists had. He teaches that the Word or Thought of God dwelt in him in some mysterious way. He does not indeed ever teach that Jesus is himself God. On the contrary, he tells us how Jesus prayed to God as the Father above him. But he does clearly teach that God's Word or Thought shone forth from the soul of Jesus in a very special and wonderful manner.

Then again in the Epistles of Paul we find that this great teacher hardly ever refers to the life of Jesus on the earth, or to the beautiful sayings which he uttered, but thinks chiefly of his death and resurrection, and insists on faith in him as the essential matter. Still even Paul feels that love is, after all, the chief thing, and in a glorious passage he speaks of faith and hope and

love, but declares very emphatically that love (or charity) is the greatest of these three.

### **How the Belief in the God-Man grew up.**

When we pass from the New Testament to the early history of the Christian Church, we find that the minds of men gradually turned away from the simple and beautiful precepts and parables of Jesus, and those incidents of his life in Galilee on which the earlier Gospels dwell so lovingly, in order to enter into endless discussions as to his nature. By slow degrees the original impression which the man Jesus had left on the hearts of his disciples faded out, and the Church began to think that the most important thing was to have a correct theory about his person. And it was not very long before some writers and preachers began to say that he was not a man at all, that he only seemed to be a man, that his body was not a real body, but only the appearance of a body, and that he himself was not a man, but a Divine Being. But others pointed to the Gospels and insisted, rightly enough, that the Gospel writers clearly regarded him as a

man. Then, after long discussion, the strange idea was started that he was Man and God as well, and in a confused way this gradually came to be the doctrine of the Church.

But such a doctrine started fresh difficulties. If Jesus was God, was he the same as the Father, or different? And if he was different, were there two Gods or only one? And some three hundred years after Christ there was great danger that the Christian Church would actually come to believe in two Gods instead of one. Then, to get out of the difficulty, even at the expense of a contradiction, it was decided that, although the Father was God and Christ was God, yet there were not two Gods, but only one. The Son, it was said, was not the Father, and the Father was not the Son. But Father and Son were each of them God. Yet there were not two Gods, but one.

### **How the Belief in the Trinity grew up.**

Meanwhile, there had arisen yet another line of thought. The New Testament sometimes speaks of God under the name of the Holy Spirit, a beautiful description of the Father

who breathes his love into the souls of men. But now men began to say that if the Father was God, and the Son was God, the Holy Spirit was God also. Yet they insisted that the Holy Spirit was different from both the Father and the Son. And so at last after centuries of disputation and turmoil and even bloodshed, in which the simple teaching of Jesus was sadly forgotten and neglected, the famous doctrine of the Trinity was constructed, and the Christian Church declared that 'the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Ghost (or Spirit) is God ; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.'

Now I ask you to read the Athanasian Creed, in which this doctrine was finally laid down, and then to turn from it to the fifth chapter of *Matthew* or the fifteenth of *Luke*, and to say whether, in the centuries between the Gospels and the Creed, Christianity had not strangely changed its character. Jesus teaches that love to God and love to man are the two chief laws, and that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must become like little children. The Athanasian Creed, on the contrary, declares that unless we believe exactly what it lays down, including all the strange contradictions of the three Persons

and one God, we shall 'without doubt perish everlastingly.'

**Unitarian Christianity wants to go back  
to Jesus.**

Now we Unitarian Christians want to start afresh with the simple and beautiful truths which Jesus taught, and putting away the tangled and complicated Creeds which grew out of the conflicts of successive generations of theologians in an ignorant and unscientific age, to call on men as the chief thing of all to put into practice that Law of Love which we have straight from the lips of Jesus, and which he set forth in his pure and gracious life.

Do you think that we are right, or do you think that we are wrong?



## WHAT UNITARIANS BELIEVE.

By REV. CHAS. HARGROVE, M.A.

WHAT do Unitarians believe? The difficulty in giving what is called a straightforward answer is that Unitarians, unlike all other religious bodies, have never accepted a creed or authoritative confession of faith. If any one desires to join them, it is supposed that he does so because he finds their forms of worship acceptable, and agrees more or less with what he generally hears preached from their pulpits. No questions are asked as to what he believes or disbelieves, he becomes a member of a congregation by his own adherence, not by the decision of others on his faith or fitness.

So it comes to pass that some Unitarians are much nearer the more popular forms of Christianity than others are, and no one has the right to find fault with another for believing too much or too little. Still there are certain things on which there is a general, if

not unanimous, agreement, and we may say—without committing anyone, that

### **Unitarians do not believe**

In the Trinity, or that there are three persons in One God.

In the Incarnation, or that Jesus Christ is God and man in one person.

In Verbal Inspiration, or that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

In the Atonement, as meaning that man is a fallen creature, born in sin, and needs a mediator to reconcile him with God.

In Justification by Faith, in the sense that either church, or sacraments, or creed, or Bible is necessary to a good and godly life.

In death, as the end of all effort and all hope, or that this life is man's only probation, and that weal or woe unchangeable follows after it.

In Satan and Hell, or that there is in God's universe any place or person, in which evil, and hatred, and misery are everlasting.

### **Unitarians do believe**

That there is One God, and that all who ever so dimly recognise, and 'in spirit and

in truth,' reverence an Unseen Power which 'makes for righteousness,' are his accepted worshippers.

That Jesus of Nazareth was a great teacher, rightly called Christ (or the anointed), because 'God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power' (*Acts* x. 38), and that true Christians are all those who try to think and act according to his precepts and example.

That the Bible is a record of the thoughts of devout men about God and his works and the way of serving him, as from age to age He revealed himself more fully; that it is thus preeminently the book of religious experience, and as such to be read and revered by all who would profit by the lessons of the past, so hardly learnt and so easily forgotten.

That man is a child of God, and has always free access to him, as a son, even a prodigal, has to a good father.

That Prayer is a lifting-up of our thoughts to God, and the expression of the heart's desire in his Presence.

That Salvation consists in deliverance from misery, sin, and error; and that forms of religion are to be judged of by the measure of their efficiency in saving men from these evils.

That it will fare with us ill or well after death, just as we have lived well or ill in this world, according to the words of the prophet—‘ Say ye of the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for he shall eat the fruit of his doings. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.’—*Isaiah* iii. 10, 11.

Finally, that God is more Good than the best of fathers, and more Just than the most upright of Judges ; that we can therefore commit ourselves to him in absolute confidence that He will always do with us as is for our true welfare, here and everywhere, now and for ever.

And this, they maintain, is the true Catholic or Universal Faith which underlies all forms of religion, and which if a man believe and live by he will assuredly be saved.

## THE GOD-CHRIST OR THE HUMAN CHRIST?

By REV. R. A. ARMSTRONG, B.A.

THE doctrine of the God-Christ, that in Jesus of Nazareth manhood and Godhead were mysteriously united, and that he, one person, yet enjoyed two natures, is still tenderly cherished as a truth of vital religion by many pious souls who find a joy in it, and do not concern themselves to examine its reasonableness or its evidence, and are not in the current of latter-day philosophy and thought. And yet even so, I doubt whether these devout men and women really ever face the doctrine fairly, and grasp it all at one moment in their imagination. While the heart is dwelling in gentle awe on the thought of Christ the God, and prayer ascends to his heavenly throne, the mind has turned away from the thought of Christ the man, and is all filled with the divinity of the object of its adoration. But when in turn the heart is

drawn in tender affection to Christ the man, and the feeling of his human brotherhood is strong upon the spirit, then Christ the God is left altogether in the background, half-forgotten, and it is the sweet humanity of Jesus that alone floods the soul with delight. At no one time, I am persuaded, is the mind steadily focussed on the two-fold nature of the person of Christ. The light of imagination never beats with equal brilliance and illuminating power on the Godhead and the manhood. The one or the other is always in the shadow; and the pious Christian alternately draws religious strength and grace from the divine and the human image.

And why is this? It is because in naked truth the idea of God-man, Man-God, is in itself contradictory, and cannot therefore be presented to the mind. It is *not* an idea, *not* a conception; but the confusion, blurred and undefined, of two conceptions or ideas which are mutually exclusive of one another.

Do not suppose that I am objecting to mystery in religion. Mystery is that which is above and beyond our human understanding. We know God quite surely a little way; beyond that we know him not, and the region of mystery unfathomable begins for us.

But that is not to say that in God there is any contradiction. God has given us reason, very circumscribed, but it is the voice of his own undying truth as far as it goes. It cannot measure the infinities and eternities : but wherein it is capable of deciding, there we may trust it as we would trust God himself. And it is a plain matter of simple reason, entirely within the limits of our understanding, that the same person cannot be God and man.

For what is man? Man is a creature gifted with wonderful and noble endowments, yet of finite power in every possible direction. He is limited in physical strength, limited in intellectual understanding, limited in knowledge, limited in the stretch and scope of his affections. And in all these things not limited only : but in every one of them he begins with a very small beginning, and as the years go by he grows. In body, in mind, in soul, he does not rest the same from the beginning ; but he grows,—increases in stature, and if it be well, then also in favour with God and man. The very conception of a man is of a finite and a growing being ; and if Jesus was man, he was a finite and a growing being ; and if he was not a finite and a growing

being, whether he was God or not, at least he was not man.

But that other nature which theologians bid us combine with the Man-nature in Jesus Christ: this God-nature, what is that? What is God? What but the infinite Power, the infinite Soul, ever prevailing in all stars and suns, penetrating with indomitable energy through all the fibre and the ether of the universe! And what was God in the beginning? Has there in God been growth, gradual enlargement of capacity, and rising up to an inheritance of faculty not grasped at first? Nay, but he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; perfect in power and goodness from the first even unto the last.

How then of the God-man, the being perfect man, perfect God? He is perfect man: that is he is limited in every faculty. He is perfect God; that is he is limited in no faculty whatever. As man he grew from the impotence and ignorance of infancy. As God he was equipped to the full from the very beginning of eternity, and never grew. A man may say of a piece of ground that it measures only a square yard, but that yet it measures a full square mile. I can think first of the land that is a square yard; and I can think



afterwards of the land that is the square mile. But I cannot think of them as both one piece of land and co-extensive. And it will not do to tell me the thing is a mystery, and so to be believed. I say there is no mystery at all about it, nothing but flat contradiction. And I am constrained to say the same if you tell me of a being both man and God, a being in each particular endowment at once finite and infinite, in each particular endowment both growing from small beginnings and steadfastly the same for ever.

Setting aside then the figment of the two natures in Christ, we have boldly to address ourselves to the question which of the two this being was who appeared in Galilee, and so strangely stirred men ; was he man or was he God ?

With the widening scope of modern knowledge, it would seem impossible to believe on any conceivable testimony that the Supreme Spirit of this boundless universe at a set period of time assumed the likeness of one of the dwellers on this tiny earth, and inhabited that narrow land which even on the face of this tiny earth is so minute. And when it is added that this was the central scheme of the vast universe, that for the handful

of creatures clinging to one grain of sand on the unmeasured shores of creation, he who holds that creation in the hollow of his hand planned his own death and resurrection, surely no myth of Hindu or Hellenic fable sounds so wild ! When it was held that earth was the centre of creation, and that all the mighty stars were but the little lights hung out to shine on it, then it was possible to think that the central drama of the universe might be acted on our soil, and that God left the heavens to pace the coasts of our world, and died that our world might have salvation. But now that we know that the Earth is not so much as a star at all, and that even the sun round which we circle is but one of the least of the spheres that throng the heavens, who can suppose that we are singled out for this divine pageant in which God himself assumes the creature's form, and endures the creature's agony and death ? Or are we to say that on each of those myriad globes that look to us but as drops of crystal glittering in the skies above, that in each one of those which may be peopled by rational and spiritual beings, God the Son has successively descended, there to be crucified, and buried, and to rise triumphant

from the tomb, that they who believe in him might be washed in his blood and presented spotless at the throne of grace?

From such vain fancies let us turn back to Jesus himself, as from the record of the first three Gospels we may picture to ourselves his life. I say the first three; for, in the fourth, already the mist is rising before the eyes, and the figure by the Galilean lake is not seen with the same clearness of outline as at first; theological and philosophical subtleties have got mixed up with his story and with his words. Even in the earlier Gospels we must read with care, remembering how easily the story of miracle and the colouring of olden prophecy came to be blended by disciples with their recollections of the Master's words and deeds. Nevertheless in these Gospels the answer to our question is not doubtful: Is he man or God?

They tell of one who lives in a lowly village home, and in bright-eyed boyhood increases as boys will in stature, and as good boys still do, in favour with God and man. One who for long weeks struggles in the solitude of the wilderness with temptation in subtle form, until the pure spirit within him conquers, and he rises up in the grace and

strength of victory. One who in the last hours, when his enemies are gathered to compass his death, prays that the mortal cup may be taken from him, until at last 'Thy will be done' rises through the air to God; and once more in the strength of the conqueror he goes out to meet bonds and stripes and death. One who finally, when the mortal anguish burns in every nerve, for a moment cries, as the darkness seems thick around his blinded eyes, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' but then with the last breath of expiring life, conqueror yet once more, breathes, if we may so interpret the varying record, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!'

Is that agonised, striving, conquering being God, or is he man? That cannot be God! God is not tempted, is not agonised, does not strive, does not even for a moment lose his heart in the thick darkness, does not at the last find a strength above himself and rest in the compassion of a Father who shall receive his spirit. This is surely man,—a man of men!

The orthodox apologists cry out at us with vehemence, because we make of Jesus 'a mere man.' But surely that is a hasty

expression. Surely that contemptuous adjective 'mere' has no business there, as if man were necessarily a creature so mean and poor and low. Even in the most degraded, Jesus would tell us that the golden gem of kinship with God is never lost, only buried under the garbage of the world. Man is a being that communes with God, whom God loves with an infinite love, to whom God speaks in conscience and by every witness of the beautiful and true, a being with the power of prayer and whose prayers win the sure answer of God himself. God is his Father; he is God's child. And when we say that Jesus was man, we do him no dishonour. We ascribe to him endowments by which he may be the very image and mirror of God.

It has always seemed to me that if Jesus was really a God-man, then his helpfulness to us as an example of the faithful life can be but small. Here is one who had God-nature for the substance of his being. No wonder then that he overcame temptation and kept a steadfast course. What else would you expect? But surely what we want for an encouragement and inspiration to trample temptation beneath our feet, is

not a God who did so, but a man. I want to know whether it is possible for *man*, with all the weakness that belongs to sheer humanity, so to lay hold of the love of God that he fights his way thereby to purity of heart and sanctity of soul. And looking to the Gospels, I say, 'Yes, for Jesus did it.' What one man has done, others may at least attempt, bating no jot of heart or hope. But if you cut off my hope, by saying, 'Nay, but Jesus Christ was God,' then I know not where else to look for the human friend and brother who has fought the fight through like him.

Again, I say with all tenderness, but with supreme conviction, that the fancy of the God-Christ has stood in the way of the true God, and held men aloof from the Father himself. Jesus of Nazareth poured out his whole heart in pleading with men to go straight to the Father with their love and confidence and prayer. He never put himself between them. He bade us say, 'Our Father who art in Heaven.' The God-Christ confuses our worship and withdraws it from the Father. The human Christ leaves the personality of God, the Father, the One Holy Spirit, clear and vivid.

## THE ATONEMENT.

By REV. FRANK WALTERS.

THE doctrine of the Atonement as taught by our orthodox Churches was first clearly formulated by the theologian Anselm in the twelfth century. He published a book called 'Cur Deus Homo,' in which he interpreted the death of Christ as a sacrifice to the justice of God. By the fall of Adam all his posterity came under the wrath of God, and as the guilt of man was incurred against an infinite Being, the punishment must be nothing less than everlasting torment in hell. If man was to be saved, it must be through the suffering of a Victim, the dignity of whose person should give infinite value to his sacrifice. The eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, became Man, in order to offer himself a sacrifice to the wrath of God, and so redeem the human race from the curse. The sufferings of Christ on Calvary were accepted by God as an equiva-

lent for the punishment of the world's transgression. The sins of the whole world were imputed to Christ, while Christ's perfect righteousness was imputed to those who by faith received the Atonement.

Now this theory of the mediæval scholar is based on three false doctrines—

- (1) A False Doctrine of God.
- (2) A False Doctrine of Sin.
- (3) A False Doctrine of Salvation.

(1.)—*This theory of the Atonement denies the Fatherhood of God.* If Christianity means the teaching of Christ, and not the laboured systems of priests and theologians, then no doctrine can be Christian which denies that God is the Father of all men. But no good earthly father ever demands his children's suffering except as the means of saving them from sin. A wise father will, indeed, employ severe punishment to make his child understand the greatness of his fault; but the punishment is a proof of love and not of anger, and is never continued one moment longer than is needful to bring the child to sorrow and repentance. But the doctrine of the Atonement represents the Heavenly Father requiring endless torment as the penalty of



his creatures' sins. The pangs of hell are not intended as a means of restoration, but only as the satisfaction of the insatiable vengeance of God. And worse than that—God's anger is so revengeful that He does not care where the punishment falls, so that He is able to pour out the whole of his fury on some devoted victim. The sufferings of the innocent will 'satisfy' his justice quite as well as the punishment of the guilty. If we heard of some heathen god who was represented as acting in such a way, how we should want to send Christian missionaries to enlighten the dark idolaters! If any judge on the bench were to allow an innocent man to be hanged in the place of a murderer, what an outcry there would be against the gross injustice! Justice can never be 'satisfied' by punishing the innocent for the guilty, for that is the worst form of injustice. A doctrine which teaches that God demands everlasting pain as the punishment of his children, and is willing to pour out his wrath on an innocent victim, *must be false, for no good earthly father, nor just and upright earthly judge, could so act.*

(2)—*This theory of the Atonement involves a false doctrine of Sin.* We are told that

Christ's sufferings 'satisfied' divine justice, because our sins were 'imputed' to him. And in the same way we are saved by faith in Christ's sacrifice, because his perfect righteousness is 'imputed' to us. But sin and righteousness are not *things* which can be transferred from one person to another; they are *conditions* of character which bring their own inevitable consequences to every soul. If I owe £100, you can pay my creditor, and relieve me of my burden; but by no process of 'imputation' can my sin become yours, and your goodness mine. It is blasphemous to think of God treating an innocent being as guilty of the crimes of sinful men. God sees us exactly as we are, and no 'robe of righteousness' can ever hide our secret sins from his sight. The Psalmist had the true doctrine of sin when he cried, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' 'For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

(3)—*This theory of the Atonement is based on a false doctrine of Salvation.* True salvation is deliverance, not from suffering, but from sin. The diseased man does not ask to be relieved of the pain, but to be cured of the complaint which causes the pain. When the disease is healed, the pain departs as well; and so when we are saved from sin, we are delivered from its curse. This is what we are taught, over and over again, in the Bible. 'When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.' 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' We are all familiar with that beautiful parable in which Jesus describes the 'way of salvation.' The young man who had left his home and wandered into sin and folly, was saved *by coming home again*. He began to be saved as soon as he said, 'I will arise and go to my father.' And did the father want him to find a substitute to be punished in his place? No! he was satisfied to have his son saved from degradation and deeply penitent for his sin. Salva-

tion does not consist in being delivered from a place called Hell, and being made heir of another place called Heaven. Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' Heaven and Hell are within us—they are states of soul, conditions of character. Heaven means love and purity. Hell means hatred and impurity. And so we have the words of the great Master, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' To the poor sinful woman, Christ's gospel was, 'Go and sin no more.' He taught that eternal life consisted in love, and was obtained by obedience to the two great commandments, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself.'

The true meaning of Atonement is *Reconciliation*, and the man who loves Goodness and Truth supremely, who strives continually to conquer sin and rise into a better life—that man comes, every day he lives, into closer reconciliation to the God of Love and Holiness.

## MAN'S NATURE.

By REV. JAMES C. STREET.

‘**I** WONDER,’ says Theodore Parker, ‘at the beauty of this world. I am amazed before a little flakelet of snow, at the strangeness of its geometry, its combinations of angles, at the marvellous chemistry which brought these curious atoms together. I reverence the Infinite God, who made the ocean, earth, air, three sister graces, for handmaids to attend this fledgling of the sky. I look up and wonder at the stars : I am astonished at the beauty of that great constellation Orion, which every night unveils its majestic forehead to the eyes of men. I study its nebula with a telescope, and it resolves itself to stars so distant that those mighty orbs seem but flakes of cloud to the unassisted eye. In fancy, I clothe them with verdure, trees of their own, and people them with beasts, birds, fishes, insects, and the like. I have confidence in the laws

which lead and guide them, and they are a great revelation of the omnipotence of God. But I compare them with man, with spirit, its laws, its powers, its imperial duration, and its faculty of unbounded growth ; and Orion, with its nebula, seen to be stars, is as much inferior to man as that snowflake to the constellation. And when I reflect upon this world of consciousness, the powers born in us,—which seem but as flakelets of a cloud now, but which, seen through my telescopic faith in God, resolve themselves into stars too distant to be seen, and only dimly brought to consciousness in such a soul as Christ's,—then I forget the constellation and all the starry beauty of the world, forget the joy of trust that constellation taught, and find delight in that higher joy and nobler trust which my own nature has revealed to me.'

This fine passage opens out our theme.

### I.—Man's Nature is ■ Prophecy.

Look at the evolution of its powers—

(1.) **Mental.**—Consider the enormous distance there is between an Australian aboriginal and Sir Isaac Newton, yet both are of the same genus. Between the two lies

the whole world of human life, and yet the one contains the germs of the other. An African spells his way slowly through the alphabet : Humboldt writes 'The Cosmos,' and Kant 'Pure Reason.' What worlds of mental power lie between the first ballads of a people, and Milton's 'Paradise Lost' and Goethe's 'Faust!' All the early efforts were just so many finger-posts and prophecies for the future.

(2.) **Moral.**—Contrast the lawless savagery of barbarous ages with the modern development of moral laws. First, An eye for an eye,—life for life—thine eye shall not pity : then, Love your enemies—do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you—love your neighbour as yourself. First savage Justice, and then true Righteousness. Yet in the fierce reprisals and bitter feuds of savage times were the elements of real justice, order, and right doing. The one was a prophecy of the other. Slowly but steadily the divine moral code emerged from the darkness of ages in response to the unerring prophecy of its appearance.

(3.) **Spiritual.**—The savage worshipped fire, water, thunder : a higher development brought the worship of sun, moon, and stars:

then men worshipped Jove, Ormuzd, Vishnu, Jehovah; little by little the true development went on until it was proclaimed,—God is a Spirit, and the true worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth. But the first act of worship, the first tremulousness of spirit before unknown powers, the earliest recognition of dependence, were so many distinct and positive prophecies of the highest spiritual worship of the Living God.

In all these ways man's nature has pointed forward to the lofty, the noble, the divine. The past has been a prophecy of the present. The seed of great harvests was sown in the mind and heart of man. Each nature has been God's prophet.

## **2.—This Prophecy tells of Eternal Growth.**

We have seen how the past has prophesied of the present. Let us now ask ourselves—Is prophecy ended? Did man's nature exhaust itself in producing Newton, Shakespeare, Humboldt, and Milton? Was all possible knowledge obtained? Had all wisdom been found? Have the greatest men felt that they had accomplished everything? Read their lives and you will find



that at death they seemed but on the threshold of Infinite Realms. 'More light,' cried Goethe, in his last moments; and Newton compared himself to a child gathering a pebble or two on the sea-shore, while the mighty ocean of truth rolled on unceasingly before him. 'Now,' said Paul, 'I know in part: but then shall I know even as also I am known.'

Look into the plans great men have prepared. What schemes they have laid down! how to the very end of life they were contemplating more! What does all this foretoken? Here are powers ready for work, plans prepared, and nothing but death checking them. Is everything to be left unfinished? Is it likely that imperfection is to be the lot of all? When you think of all this, and discover that by use men's powers grow and do not diminish, that the more the mind has done the more it can do, is it possible to believe that all this power is wasted? Present civilization has been gradually evolved out of past barbarism: will nothing more come? We see the race of men growing: will the individual not also grow? *Men* advance: will not *man*?

Here are the powers of mind, of heart, and of spirit unexhausted, increasing in potency : do they not prophecy of constant growth ? Once rise to the thought that death is a barrier easily overleaped, and the conclusion that we shall go on eternally growing is inevitable. Given powers developing by exercise, and the noblest exercise eternally to be had, and what remains but eternal growth ?

From this argument come these two conclusions :—

(1.) *There is a continuousness of life.* Death is not the end of man. Ages of men come and go, but the individual man goes on for ever. Death is to man what a fence is to a hunter—no more.

(2.) *Our life hereafter is a constant development.* We do not enter upon a dead-level of uniformity. Our life is not like a sea of glass. It is not even like an ocean ebbing and flowing with constant tides, but like a sea constantly rising to loftier heights, and containing profounder deeps. ‘Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.’

## A COMMON SENSE VIEW OF THE BIBLE.

By REV. BROOKE HERFORD, D.D.

ONE day some workmen were making alterations and repairs in our Sunday school. It happened that one of the reading books had been left lying about from the Sunday before, and in the course of his work one of the men came upon it, and took it up. It was a Bible, not a very strange book, one would have thought, to find in a Sunday school! The man, however, seemed to think otherwise. He took it into his hand, and examined it carefully, evidently as if he could scarcely believe his own eyes, and then turning to one of his mates, who was working near, he beckoned to him to come and look at it, saying, 'Hey! what do'st think—here's a Bible!' Now, rather fortunately, the man he so addressed was a member of our congregation, and so he at once answered, 'Well, what of that, hast thou never seen a Bible before?' 'Aye,' said the man, 'but

they're Unitarians, and dunnot use the Bible; what dun' they do wi' it?' 'Why, come here next Sunday morning,' replied my friend, 'and thou'lt see what they do with them; thou'lt see forty of them all being used. What do'st hearken to such tales for? Thou shouldst hear and judge for thyself.'

Now it is not pleasant to be misrepresented, and to be told we reject the Bible, when the fact is we value it just as much as any other Christians, and read it for the help of our faith, and try, according to the light God gives us, to find out what it is, and what it teaches. Such misrepresentation, however, does not trouble us much as a Church. Men will find out they have done injustice in a little while, and we could well afford to hold our peace and wait our time. But we believe that the views about the nature of the Bible to which we have come are very important, and that there never was a time when it was more necessary for men really to understand what the Bible is, and how it ought to be used. The spirit of inquiry is abroad—men are asking what Christianity is, and what the Bible is? and because we wish that in 'proving all things,' men should 'hold fast that which is good,' we would set

forth plainly the real grounds upon which the Bible is entitled to retain its old place as the 'Holy Scriptures,' the 'Book of Books.'

One great mistake that people make about the Bible is thinking it to be all one book. If you look into it you will see it is not one book, but a great many books, though all bound up together. There are no less than sixty-six different books, written by probably forty different authors, living at different times extending over near 2,000 years, and using different languages. It is, in fact, a literature, a library, rather than a book. Now, the question is:—what connects all these together; what is there which is common to all of them; why are they bound up in one volume and called 'the Bible,' or 'the Book'? The answers to this question given by those who alike receive and reverence the Bible, may be mainly divided into two. One is that these books, though bearing the names of different authors, were really written by those persons *at the dictation of the spirit of God*, and that therefore, from beginning to end, there is and can be nothing but perfect, inspired truth. The other answer is, that through law-givers, prophets, and most of all through Jesus

Christ, God has revealed his will and truth ; their lives, their teachings, have been ' revelations '—and the Bible, in its many different books, contains the record of these revelations, and the history of the people to whom they were given. We believe this latter to be the true answer—in a word, we receive the Bible as containing *the records of God's gradual revelation to man*.

In order that this matter may be made as clear as possible, we will say a few words—first, about the inspired men through whom the revelations came : second, about those who, in different ages, wrote the records of them in the books which are collected together in the Bible.

' God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,' says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter i. 1 and 2). That puts the matter very simply. From the beginning, God has been unfolding the knowledge of himself and of his will, through patriarchs, lawgivers, prophets. These we call *inspired*—that is, the spirit of God, which Christ tells us is given to them that ask (*Luke xi. 13*), worked

in their hearts in a way which gave them such a sense of his will and truth, as raised them far above those around them. This they told to men—uttering it in their words, trying to live it out in their actions. But, remember, as it has been well said, 'when God makes a *prophet* He does not unmake the *man*.' A prophet may be inspired with high religious truth ; and yet, on other things, such as history, or science, he may be on a level with other men ; nay more, he may be only able to tell imperfectly that truth with which he is inspired, and yet it may be a real revelation. So we find it in the old Bible times. We read how Abraham was so inspired with the thought of the one true God, that he felt bidden to go forth from his own land and kindred, seeking another country where he might build up a people in the knowledge of that great truth ; yet Abraham was not perfect. Moses was inspired : God's spirit gave him a wonderful discerning of the eternal law, and made him wise to rescue his people and guide them in their wanderings, till, from a mere race of slaves, they became a brave, hardy, united people, fit to be a *nation*. Yet the story tells how Moses erred, and was not suffered

to enter the promised land. So David was at times inspired :—who can read the outpourings of praise and prayer in some of his Psalms, and not feel that these are aglow with the spirit of God? Yet David fell into dark, grievous sin. So with the prophets witnessing for God, speaking out in burning words of warning and rebuke the thoughts which God's spirit breathed into them against idolatry and sin. None of these were perfect,—yet they were all *revealers of God*: through them he spake to the fathers,—more and more clearly, as ages passed by, leading on gradually to the fullest revelation in and through Jesus Christ. In him, we have the perfect revelation, 'God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him' (*John* iii. 34). In him we see 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (*2 Cor.* iv. 6). In him we have the word of God—not uttered in broken language, as by the best of the prophets,—but so infused into the very texture of his thought and spirit and life, that men called him, 'the word made flesh.'

All these, then, as they lived and taught, were *revealers* to their own day, to those who heard them. Now, how could the bless-



ing of the truth they revealed be perpetuated, that it might become the light of the world?

The books of the Bible are the answer. They contain the memorials of this inspiration which, from age to age, was leading on the world to the clearer knowledge of God. As soon as ever there were men among the Hebrews who could write, the worthiest subject they could write about was the dealings of God with their people, the traditions of those great leaders who had handed down from generation to generation the knowledge of God. So the Scriptures grew; each generation adding something, history or psalm or prophecy, to the holy writings which thus came to be revered as the testimonies of God. Then came the brightest revelation of all in Christ. A new era for the world began in the 'good news' which his teachings of God's love and mercy, and of the heavenly home, were, to the weary and heavy-laden and perplexed. Those who had been his chosen companions and apostles went far and wide, teaching the Gospel, and as churches sprang up and multiplied, the Scriptures of the new faith grew up for their use. First, letters written by the apostles to the churches among whom they

had laboured ; then narratives of the life and teachings of their Lord by those who had been eye-witnesses or had heard from eye-witnesses ; and afterwards the stories of the apostles' preaching in the book of ' Acts,' collected by Luke, the companion of St. Paul ; and last of all the ' Revelation ' of St. John. These at last were gathered together into one book of the ' New Testament,' the Christian Scriptures.

In this manner were the books of the Bible formed—recording, for the instruction of all times, the lives and teachings of those, who else must have been a blessing to their own day alone.

But the sacredness of these records consists in the inspiration of those about whom they tell us, not in the inspiration of those who wrote about them. Understand this: it was the inspiration of God which enlightened Abraham and Moses ; but no inspiration was needed to tell the story of them, and to hand it down as the tradition of the people. To take the best example, it was in the most perfect inspiration, in the indwelling spirit of God, that Christ lived and taught ; but it needed no inspiration in those who had been eye-witnesses and hearers of his, to write

down afterwards what they remembered of his life and teachings. Nor do they claim any inspiration in writing their Gospels. Look at the first verses of *St. Luke*:—‘Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word ; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.’ Not one word about writing by inspiration, there. And anyone who will read all the four Gospels will find that they are just such accounts of the most striking events and teachings of Christ as his disciples and afterwards their followers would be likely to write after many years, and far away from one another. They are not perfect accounts. They often differ on small matters, report the words of Christ variously, and yet on the main facts, which would be most deeply impressed on their minds, they agree. They differ as to whether it was

one or two madmen whom Christ healed at Gadara: one says blind Bartimæus was healed as they went into Jericho; another puts it as they were leaving the city. They all give differently the words inscribed on the cross, though each seems to be giving the exact words. In many ways it is clear that they are not writing an exact account dictated by the spirit of God, but what they themselves could recollect or had heard. And so, all through the Bible, while on every page we find the evidence that God was revealing himself to the world through the teachers and prophets of old, through Christ and his chosen Apostles in a later day, and that their inspiration was not a dream but a reality; with equal clearness do we find the marks of human imperfection, forgetfulness, and ignorance, in the writings which record all these things for the instruction of after ages. The religion is divine; the revelations are of God; they are *His Word to the world*; but the words in which that gradual utterance is made known and recorded, are the words of men.

But it is often said, that these views tend to overthrow the Bible, and lead to infidelity. Not at all! They place the

Bible on a foundation which cannot be shaken, and turn the best weapons of infidelity against itself. If it is to be maintained that all the Bible was written by the dictation of God, there is no room for error or disagreement on any subject, for God knows all things ; and his Spirit could not differ from itself in the least things any more than in the greatest. On that view, every discrepancy, every mistake in history or science, is a fatal blow to its authority. And this has been the ground of attack which has been most commonly taken ; and many have been led to give up the Bible entirely, by finding that they could give no answer to such objections. But let the Bible be regarded in its true light, and this difficulty disappears. The spirit of God teaches the knowledge of God, but does not enlighten a man about astronomy or geology. A man may be inspired with great thoughts of true religion, and yet he may be no wiser than the people of his time on other matters of human knowledge.

Nay, in one very striking way, that which otherwise would be a difficulty, becomes a great support and evidence for the truth of Scripture. Take the four Gospels—the narra-

tives of our Saviour's life and teachings. Of all parts of the Bible, it is most necessary to feel that we can rely on them. With even a single Gospel, and *believing it*, no one could be ignorant of the religion of Christ, even though he knew nothing of the rest of the Bible. Well, to those who say that these are narratives dictated by the Spirit, the differences between the accounts are fatal difficulties. But when these differences are pointed out to us, we say, 'yes, we know they are there; and they are the strongest proof that these gospels are not "cunningly devised fables," that the writers had no collusion and agreement with one another as to what they should write;—but that they wrote independently of each other.' If they had been inspired what to write, they could not have differed. If they had been agreeing together what they would write, they would have taken care to let there be no difference. But as it is, they differ continually on little matters, which had not been remembered alike; while the agreement which there is on all the great events of Christ's life, and on all the main points of his teaching—shows how trustworthy their records are, and establishes our faith in

Christ upon a foundation which cannot be shaken.

There is one other objection which is made to this common-sense view of the Bible. Those who believe that from end to end it is all inspired, ask, how otherwise will you know which is divine and true? How will you know which part to receive and study and regard as 'Holy Scripture,' and which to put aside as mere human additions? Well, that sounds a very plausible objection, but in reality there is nothing in it. Do I need anyone to teach me the difference between an ancient jewel and the earth that has got crusted to it? Do I need anyone to teach me the difference between sour bread and sweet? That is all there is in it. Our faculties are not perfect, far enough from that; but they are quite clear enough to show us which are the divinest parts of the Bible, the real 'bread of life' which is good for our souls. Trust your own heart! When you feel shocked by the old stories of the slaughter of the Canaanites, but moved and touched by the Saviour's 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,'—can you not tell which was merely earthly, and which 'the wisdom that cometh from

above ?' Read *most* what most touches you and helps you. As has been well said: the spirit which inspired the Bible, teaches us to understand the Bible.

'The spirit breathes upon the word,  
And brings the truth to sight.'

This is what is commonly believed among us about the Bible ; but we do not condemn others. Let us all read it according to our light, with earnest desire to learn the divine truth it has to teach, and we cannot go far wrong.



## OUR CHRISTIAN POSITION.

By REV. G. VANCE SMITH, D.D.

THE word Christian is one of somewhat vague and elastic import; and it would seem to need something by way of explanation to make it clear ; otherwise we may be using the word, or thinking of it, in different senses.

A Christian then is one who is a *disciple* of Christ ;—according to the earliest notice of the word which is to be met with, ‘The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.’ A disciple, again, is one who learns, or has learned from another ; and who feels himself drawn by the respect and sympathy of a learner towards his teacher. The Christian will entertain such feelings towards Christ ; he will look to him with reverence ; will desire to imitate the example of faithfulness to the sense of duty and of Love to God and man which he has given to the world.

But what then, it may be asked, is the Christian *to believe*? In reply, I can only say, Christ has left us no formal creed, nor authorized any person to draw one up for him. Intellectually, therefore, we are free men, much as we are politically or socially; free, that is, to pursue the truth, to think and speak according to our highest conception of truth and right. Such is the 'liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.' But yet, although the Teacher has imposed no dogmatic creed, he has given us great principles, without the acknowledgment of which no man can iustly claim to be his disciple. Pre-eminent among such principles are Love to God and Love to man, and these are what Christ himself has most emphatically enjoined upon us. And he was right in doing so; for these principles involve and lead up to everything else of chief value in the faith and practice of a religious man. Carry them out in the details of daily conduct, carry them out in the spirit of Christ, and they will add a grace and beauty and elevation and purity to human life, which as yet, alas, are too often and too sadly absent from it.

While then we are intellectually free as I

have said, yet we are bound and pledged to the service of all truth and righteousness, and no man can be a true Christian disciple who neglects this service.

In the earliest use of the word under our notice it had, no doubt, a somewhat limited and peculiar meaning. A Christian was a CHRIST-ian; and the name alluded to the Christship or Messiahship. Was Jesus of Nazareth the expected Messiah? Many said that he was *not*; but others held that he was, and that in him had come to pass the true fulfilment of ancient prophecy. The disciples who thus received him had their reasons for so doing. Into these I need not enter here; and will only observe that, whatever those reasons were, they were sufficient for the men who accepted Jesus in that great character.

But it is necessary to notice particularly that there were some ideas connected with the Christ of ancient expectation which, in the person of Jesus, were doomed to disappointment. He was not destined to set up a kingdom of temporal power; he was not destined to come again, either to rule or to judge the world; and so far as such earthly elements as these were involved in the Christ-

ship, as then understood, and in the name that was founded upon it, they were simply to remain fruitless, and in time to disappear from the world. Most probably, as we may conjecture, the purpose of these temporary Messianic beliefs was to give courage and hope and firmness to the disciples amidst the many adverse circumstances of their position. Although therefore such ideas remained unfulfilled, they cannot be said to have been without their use ; and we know that the great Providence of our lives often moves on in its mysterious course even by the medium of human misapprehensions and errors, by hopes and fears in men that issue in no abiding result among the realities of life. So it may have been, so it must have been, with much in that ancient belief in the Hebrew Messiahship. Jesus was indeed to reign, but not in that sense. The early anticipations have not been verified ; and *we* are not Christians, cannot be Christians, in that ancient and primitive sense.

But nevertheless, laying aside the unrealized faith thus associated with the Founder of Christianity, there is still left to us all that is of essential and enduring im-

portance to his office, as a spiritual King of men. He stands before us in his own personal character, divested of the artificial elements which national hope or national pride and ambition associated with him. He stands before us as the Teacher of Divine things, the Exemplar of human duty, the chosen Servant and well-beloved Son of the Almighty Father. He is shown to have been this by the long experience of eighteen centuries, and by the reverent confession of multitudes of the best men of every age since he lived ; and we can receive him, and honour him as Teacher, Saviour, Lord, not because of anything of the temporal or political kind attributed to him by the affection or the misunderstanding of his immediate followers, but for the sake of his own greatness, the beauty and the glory of his own life, the steadfastness with which he served God and man, and left to the world an example that we should follow in his steps.

What Jesus was in his personal character, I need not attempt to set forth in this place. We know it full well. The strength and beauty and clearness of his mind are seen in the simple narratives of the three his-

torical Gospels, which beyond question preserve for us the most original and faithful portraiture of their great subject which is now accessible to us—a picture which, as it stands in those Gospels, is untouched by the philosophical conceptions introduced among the Christians before the end of the first century, as seen in the peculiar thoughts and phraseology of the Fourth Gospel. We learn therefore what the personal, living Jesus was, from the Sermon on the Mount, from the various parables, precepts and prayers, to which he gave utterance, and from that spirit of devout submission to the will of God which he manifested throughout his life and especially in its closing scenes. In all this, and such as this, we have Christianity, as it lives in Christ ; we have that ‘spirit of Christ,’ without which we are none of his ; we have that which constitutes him the ‘great Chief of faithful souls’ ; and which we may each of us be proud and eager to strive to imitate, and thankful if it should so be that we are counted worthy to be called by Christ’s name.

Our Christian position then as Unitarians is one of allegiance to Jesus Christ,—allegiance, that is, to the historical Christ of the

Gospels, not the speculative theological Christ of the popular orthodoxy.

And this position, let me now observe, is one of impregnable strength to those who hold it, as against the ordinary theologies of the creeds. For no man, it may surely be said, be he Nicenist, or Athanasian, Calvinist or Wesleyan, Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Presbyterian, will venture to place his own theological system in contrast with the actual teaching of Christ, or presume to exalt the words of ancient or modern creed-makers above the spirit and the word of the Master himself.

In and by this our fealty to the Christian Head we are, as I claim, released from all similar regard for other masters. We would be disciples of Christ alone. If allowed to do so, we would call ourselves simply by his name, and be well satisfied if we could deserve to be Christians, in the highest sense of this term. In the present temper of the religious world, this is not perhaps practicable, and might involve too much of assumption on our part. Hence the necessity for the denominational name which has descended to us from the past, which is founded and always has been founded upon

an important distinctive doctrine of our faith, that of the sole and unrivalled Deity of the One Almighty Father.<sup>1</sup>

To this name I would not, of course, be understood to offer any objection, for in regard to the doctrine which it expresses we only follow Christ himself in maintaining it. The name too is an outspoken and an honest one ; and it has a fulness of meaning proper to it historically and etymologically ; nor can it, I venture to add, be deprived of this definite and long-descended signification, without violence to both history and etymology, as well as to common sense.

We may hope, however, that the day will at length dawn upon the world when simple loyalty to Christ will be held to be sufficient to distinguish the Christian man ; when sects and parties will be contented to merge their manifold differences in their confession of the one great Name of Christ, leaving the old distinctions of sect and party to fade away from the thoughts of men, even as the ancient beliefs in the ‘ Gods many and Lords

<sup>1</sup> I am aware of the obscurity which hangs over the actual origin of the word Unitarian. In the above remarks I refer to the now well-understood and long-established use of the word.



many' of heathen mythology have passed away and are remembered no more.

Here, if I had the space, I might take notice of an objection which many persons will be ready to urge against what has now been said:—to the effect that there are some things in the recorded words of Christ which are not in harmony with the highest dictates of the individual mind. For example, the anthropomorphic language in which he sometimes speaks of God; the immediate efficacy which he appears to ascribe to faith and prayer; his belief in the existence and the power of demons; and his various sayings respecting riches and poverty and the non-resistance of evil. I cannot here discuss this objection as it deserves; but I would briefly point out a consideration of importance, which ought always to be borne in mind in connection with it.

Jesus Christ, born and brought up as a Hebrew of that age, was necessarily under the influences of his training. He naturally partook of the feelings and ideas of his people on many subjects, even as he used the language which they spoke. He nowhere claims exemption from such influences,

or assumed to be intellectually infallible, and, beyond question, many subjects of ordinary speculative belief presented themselves to him much as they did to others around him.

But I do not see that this admission affects the value of his great moral and religious utterances, especially those which commend themselves as right and good to our own spiritual nature. At the same time this admission certainly puts upon the disciple the necessity both of care and discrimination in interpreting the words of Christ, and of considering well how far they were addressed specially to those who heard them spoken, how far they are applicable, in any given case, to the altered circumstances and amid the better knowledge of modern life. But, while this is allowed, the great principles of Love to God and Love to man on which Christ lays his most especial emphasis, and which, as I have before said, are pre-eminent in his teachings, these great principles, with all that they involve for the guidance and the solace of the Christian life, remain ever as the heart and essence of Christian religion; and they are not prejudiced by the accidental and transient

ideas on various subjects which formed, as it were, the intellectual outfit or framework of the Teacher's mind. The tone and quality of his spirit are everything, and these are largely independent of the vehicle of thought and language in which they found the chief medium of their expression.<sup>1</sup>

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#### POSTSCRIPT.

The attempt has recently been made by the clerical party on the London School Board to narrow the application of the word Christian so as to exclude all who cannot accept certain doctrines of the popular theology. It is not to be forgotten that those who are aiming at this result are themselves mostly pledged and bound to the antiquated theology imposed upon the Anglican Church by the Act of Uniformity. Such persons are hardly to be considered as either unprejudiced or disinterested witnesses to the import of the word Christian, however loudly they may claim to be the true or sole defenders of the faith, and may stigmatise others who

<sup>1</sup> Jesus is repeatedly termed 'Teacher' in the Gospels—as noted in the margin of the Revised Version—Comp. *Matt.* xix. 16; *John* iii. 2.

differ from them as 'unbelievers.' Clearly they have received no special commission to define Christianity, and have no authority to define it, for anyone but themselves. They are none of them infallible, any more than the church to which they belong, consisting as it so largely does of widely differing and antagonistic elements. The doctrinal forms which they maintain are no doubt very ancient; but when their origin is looked into, their antiquity will be found to be no recommendation. Christianity is nowhere in the New Testament laid before us in the form of a creed to be either believed or professed without belief. Those, therefore, who insist on the ancient creeds as necessary to the faith of a Christian, are only attempting a part which does not become them. They cannot in fact show that by virtue of their creeds they are better Christians than others whom they so lightly condemn, but only that they are more credulous and intolerant. Christ himself tells us very plainly who are his disciples; and while telling us this, he says not a word about believing this creed or that; not a word about anything else but love to God and love to man—as these indeed include everything else of practical importance to the Christian life. (See *Luke* x. 27, 28; *John* xiii. 35.)

January, 1894.

G. V. S.

## WHERE TO FIND GOD.

By REV. FRANK WALTERS.

‘O that I knew where I might find Him.’

**T**HAT was the cry of the patriarch Job. But it is also the voice of humanity. It is the utterance of perplexed, weary, doubting men in every age of the world. Listen to the cries and groans of the human soul through all ages, and they resolve themselves into the words, ‘O that I knew where I might find God!’

The whole history of the world proves that men cannot be satisfied without religious faith; they cannot rest until they find a Living God to love and trust and worship. There have been many clever arguments to prove that there is a God, but the finest evidence is found within the deepest experience of the human soul. Nothing is more convincing of God’s existence than this craving of the human mind to find an Infinite Mind,

this throbbing of the human heart to feel the sympathy of an Eternal Love.

When I see the ocean rise in one great tidal wave to flood every shore, then I know that some Mighty Attractive Power is at work, brooding over those restless waters. And so, when I see the tides of human thought and feeling surge and swell in longing and hope and aspiration, then I know that there must be a Divine Attraction drawing all souls to God. When we study the religions of the world, when we explore the religious consciousness, then we find this to be the deepest need of man's nature: 'O that I knew where I might find God!'

And there have been three answers to that cry.

Some have said, There is no God at all, and so there is no use in trying to find Him. But atheism will never triumph until it has revolutionised human nature. Religion is so involved in the very structure of our being, that you cannot root it out until you can untwist all the fibres of our intellectual and moral nature.

Others say (especially some modern philosophers), that there is indeed an absolute and eternal Power to whom you may give

the name of 'God,' but that God is hidden in inscrutable mystery, unknown and unknowable ; and however hard you try, however far you seek, you can never find Him.

But as long as men believe there is a God, do you think they will ever give up the search after Him ? In spite of all the arguments of agnosticism, men will still hope that by some new search and fresh effort the unknown God may yet be discovered. Our dauntless sailors go, time after time, in spite of scores of failures, and risk their lives, and encounter frightful sufferings, to seek the mysterious North Pole shrouded in Arctic ice and snow. And do you think that the bold, adventurous soul will not strive again and again to find out God, undaunted by dogmatic atheism and despairing agnosticism ?

But the third answer is the one I wish to enforce : There is a God, and it is possible for us to find Him and to know Him.

Now I am not going to try to *prove* that there is a God. I am not going to try to answer all the arguments of atheists and agnostics. I am going to take for granted that you feel your need of God, that you cannot help feeling that there is an awful Power by whom your life is compassed behind and be-

fore. I shall take this for granted, while I point out what seems to me the best way to find out God.

### God in Nature.

Men have tried to find God in Nature. It was through Nature that men first began to think about God ; or rather, the powers of Nature made them believe in a great many gods. At first men were like little children—everything was personal, everything had a life of its own. The sun was a god that travelled daily through the sky. Every curious stone was a deity. Every strangely shaped log of wood was the shrine of a spirit. And so, at first (in primitive fetish-worship), the imagination found gods innumerable in all the stars of heaven, and in every object upon earth. And though Nature worship seems to us very low and degrading, yet it had its place in the education of the world. By fetish-worship men became convinced that there was a Life, a Power, an Energy, vaster than themselves, which they must worship and obey. But men did not find in Nature the God for whom our hearts crave. Even when men came to believe in One



Almighty Creator, yet the God of Nature was only worshipped and obeyed and feared, but He was not loved. Men cringed and crouched before Him, but they could not rise into loving fellowship and joyful communion. Yes ; Nature, by itself, reveals a God of strength, beauty, providence ; but also a God who seems cruel to man's weakness, inexorable to man's sins, and deaf to man's prayers. Nature reveals an Almighty Ruler, not a gracious Father.

### God in the Bible.

Ah ! but (a great many people will at once cry out) there is another and more wonderful revelation of God. This Book, the Bible, can tell you more about God than you could discover, though you studied Nature for ever. And I quite agree with these people, that there is a revelation of God in the Bible, a higher and sublimer revelation than that which is found in the physical laws of the universe. Here, in the Bible, you are able to study the human soul ; and when you come to the living soul, you come nearest of all to the living God. I do not think anybody could prize the Bible more than I do.

It is the grandest book I know, and there are whole pages which shine and burn with the fire of inspiration. But what is the Bible? It is the history of man's search to find out God. It tells us how, for ages, men were trying to answer the cry, 'O that I knew where I might find Him!' It tells us how men could not rest satisfied with the terrible Power of the universe, and began dimly to guess that there was an Infinite Love and an Eternal Father. The Scriptures tell us how *other* men have searched for God. But if I am to have a God, I must seek Him and find Him for myself. You may read these prayers of David, these hymns of Isaiah, these doubts and struggles of Job; but all they can do is to show you how you may find God for yourself. Even if you could prove that God Himself wrote the Bible, I could not be satisfied. Why, the latest book in the Bible is about seventeen hundred years old. And I want to know, not what God said a thousand years ago—I want to know what message He has for us to-day. If there be a living God, He must be able to speak to me as well as to Isaiah, and Paul, and Christ. Believing, as I do, in a present, living God, when I have

read the Bible, I will shut it up and go to the shrine of my own soul, and say, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'

When my friend was travelling in distant lands his letters were precious; but best of all it is when he comes home, and I can clasp his hand, and talk to him face to face. Even if God wrote the Bible, there is something better than to be always reading the Divine Writings—and that is, to feel the touch of the Divine Presence, and to hold communion with the Divine Mind. And I can understand how some one might read the Bible, and say, 'I wish I could feel as near to God as those great Psalmists and Prophets and Apostles. They found God. O that I knew where I might find him too!'

### God in Christ.

Ah! (says some one) you can only find God in Jesus Christ. *There*, in the person and work of the great Redeemer, is the full and perfect manifestation of the unknown God. Now what do they mean when they say that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God? They must mean that the love and compassion, the purity and truth of Christ,

are divine qualities. They must mean that the character of Christ was in wonderful conformity to the will of God. In short, Christ had found God, found Him as no one else had ever found Him. Christ found God in the depths of his own profound religious consciousness; he lived in conscious communion with God; he knew the Father's will, and always obeyed it. His human nature was brought into such marvellous atonement with the Divine nature, that in a jubilee of blessedness he cried, 'I and my Father are one!' And so, when men asked Christ the way to God, he said, 'Live such a life as I am living, and you will find God as your Father.' He said, 'I am the Door;' 'I am the Way.' But you cannot find God by believing that Jesus found Him. If Jesus is the Way to God, then I must not rest satisfied with admiring and loving and worshipping him.

If Jesus could see the thousands of people worshipping him to-day, he would cry, 'Do not linger near *me*. Go into the living temple where the Father reveals Himself.' I cannot find God by believing in Christ's divinity, but only by becoming divine myself. The gate of the temple may be very beauti-

ful, but its beauty must not keep me from passing into the holy place, where I can find the immediate vision and voice of God.

### God in the Soul of Man.

There it is that alone you can find God. Unless you find God in your own soul, you will find Him nowhere ; but when you find Him *there*, you will find Him everywhere—in the person of Christ and in the page of Scripture, while even the terrors of Nature shall become the gracious discipline of a Father's love. And that is the way in which the New Testament continually tells us we must find God. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Now I am not saying that you can find out *everything* about God. But I do say that in the experience of your own souls you can find out the best things about God ; you can get the very knowledge you most need. This knowledge of God, which comes from our own human experience, is precious, because every one can possess it. It is not only for saints, and theologians, and philosophers. It is for

labouring men, and weary women, and even for little children. This religion is the most democratic thing I know. It can be understood by anyone whose heart throbs with love and whose soul aspires after purity. It does away with the aristocracy of priestcraft, and proclaims a glorious democracy of souls, who all share the Divine life and strive after the Divine likeness. That was the sublime, universal religion of humanity which Jesus taught when he said, 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' The open way to God is through the human heart—the heart made pure and childlike by the inspiration of truth and love. And the finest thing of all is this: the discovery that, in all our search for God, God has been seeking us. We talk of man groping his way after God. But Jesus tells us that the Father is always seeking those who shall worship Him in spirit and in truth. You could not long for God if God were not longing for you. These longings and cravings within our nature are the tokens of his presence and the movements of his Spirit. He not only gives the answer, but He prompts the prayer. When the human soul cries, 'O that I knew where

I might find Him !' you may be sure God is not far off.

Now, gather up the lessons: (1.) You all feel your need of God. (2.) You must find God for yourselves. (3.) You must find Him in your own higher nature—in the purity of your soul, the love of your heart, and the truth of your mind. (4.) And at length you shall discover that God has always been seeking you, and that at last He has found you. You have found God, because God has found you.

---

I CANNOT find thee! still, on restless pinion,  
My spirit beats the void where thou dost  
dwell;

I wander, lost, through all thy vast dominion,  
And shrink beneath thy light ineffable.

I cannot find thee! e'en when most adoring  
Before thy shrine I bend in lowliest prayer,  
Beyond these bounds of thought my thought  
upsoaring

From further quest comes back: thou art not  
there.

Yet high above the limits of my seeing,  
And folded far within the inmost heart,  
And deep below the deeps of conscious being,  
Thy splendour shineth: there, O God, thou  
art!

I cannot lose thee! Still in thee abiding,  
The end is clear, how wide soe'er I roam;  
The law that holds the worlds my steps is guiding,  
And I must rest at last in thee, my home.

*Eliza Scudder.*



## THE RELIGION THE AGE WANTS.

By REV. S. FLETCHER WILLIAMS.

ONE of the most pressing demands of the present age is for a practical religion. Not a religion that rears the acceptance of doctrine into superior importance, but a religion that addresses itself to moral and social reforms. Not a religion that expends its force in contending for creeds and confessions, but a religion that exhibits its power in grappling with the evils and vices of the time. Not a religion that simply satisfies itself with 'getting into the tongue and making melody with that organ,' but a religion that will help us in solving the difficulties and removing the curses of drunkenness, immorality, pauperism, and beggary. Can we wonder at the earnest call for a practical philosophy and a utilitarian religion? The spectacle of crime among high and low fills one with astonishment, and with a momentary feeling of despair. The contrast be-

tween the condition of the poor and the rich—the dark places full of the habitations of cruelty—the numbers of outcast and unfortunate who are living in lewdness, some of them living in it with the misery of a broken spirit, some of them driven to it by men who glory in corrupting the virtuous and staining the face of the beautiful, and whose unchastity yet seems not at all to tell against their standing in society—the abodes of vice and wretchedness where walls of dirt shut out human hideousness from our eyes, where men and women curse God to His face, and where little children are done to death—the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth in which thousands of our fellow-creatures pass their existence—the wickedness in high places—the zest with which even women novelists write of seduction, adultery, and intrigue, and with which the ordinary novels of the kind so written are devoured,—are not these things that make the heart ache, and wring out the cry for a power mighty to save?

Is Christianity a practical religion adequate to meet these social and moral evils? I believe that it is; and it is not an unwarrantable inference from facts, that had

Christianity been regarded more as a daily doing of righteousness and less as a creed, these miseries would not have stained and saddened our country to such a large extent. And has not Christianity been so misconceived that it has been robbed of practical influence on the realities of life? And has not the exclusion of it from the actualities of the day been intensified, and so its native potency weakened, by the cruelties, persecutions, and wars waged in its name by ecclesiastical hierarchies and priest-ridden nations?

But Christianity is eminently a practical religion. It commands us to follow in Christ's steps and work. It bids us love, worship, adore; but these are inspirations and inducements to action. It seeks the cultivation of religious thoughts; but it is not merely an aerial sail of reverie, a play of emotion, an embrace of ecstasy. When men forsake the busy walks of life to try, in indifference to the world, in silence and calmness, to reach a state of absolute repose on this side of the grave, while the tide of human needs roars along unheeded, they turn a deaf ear to the most important demands of religion. When men, like the seventeenth

century theologians, exhaust their energies in elaborating creeds and encrusting the spiritual life in rigid formularies to be used evermore as fetters upon the inquiring, expanding spirit that will not be bound, they, too, put in the rear the vital claims of religion. Religion is righteous work. Fed by devotion, it does not stop there. Animated by fervent feeling, it does not cease there. Elevated and deepened by the noblest thoughts of the human mind, it does not rest there. It is not alone to know, but to act according to knowledge. It is not indolent contemplation and study of self, not brooding over emotions of piety ; it is doing wholesome work among the anomalies, inequalities, and iniquities of social life—spreading truth, honesty, integrity in our commercial life—struggling for righteousness, justice, purity in our municipal and political life—deepening and enlightening our religious life. It was this that Clarkson meant when he said that he had no time to give to his own salvation, because that of the slave absorbed all his thoughts and energies. The religion that is confined to thoughts, raptures, devotions, does not embody the loftiest ideal. Religion is to stir the hands

and to be busy with the feet in cheering the sorrowful that their mourning may be mellowed, in healing the broken-hearted that their tears may be wiped away, in taking up the wounded from the roadside, that with wine, oil, and refreshment they may be restored. The religion of sentiment may pour forth the epithet, 'Lord, Lord,' but the religion of useful service helps on those causes by which the degraded are regenerated through the agency of generous sympathies and kindly deeds. Spiritual rapture may be good, but far better is honest and faithful work in repairing the breaches and building up the waste places of human life. There is something more precious than glowing sentiment—something always in season. It is putting hand and heart to laws, institutions, and movements by means of which human woes will be alleviated, and human wrongs by slow degrees will be redressed—by means of which knowledge will have free course and be glorified, and there will be born into the homes of our fatherland higher tastes, 'sweeter manners and purer laws'—by the influence of which men, one by one, in ever augmenting numbers, will be stimulated and strengthened

to fulfil the ideal of Tennyson's Knight who 'reverenced his conscience as his king.'

Is there in Christianity motive adequate enough, power impelling enough to secure consecration to this practical kind of work? I believe there is. What was it that inspired Jesus, what was it that constrained Paul in their spiritual reformation? It was love for man as man. It glowed in them as an enthusiasm. It was the travail of their soul to benefit, not one class of men, but man. Their love was a pure, deep, consuming passion for humanity, and it proved not only a motive sufficient to inspire and sustain them in the midst of persistent opposition and difficulty, but a power to awaken the divine in human souls. And when we look through history, we see that as men, whether moralists, social reformers, philanthropists, or statesmen have come to realize the truth of human brotherhood, so have they been able to lift men upwards out of social degradation, political serfdom, and moral ruin. The enthusiasm of humanity is the reforming power. Xavier draws the hearts of others with an irresistible spell. Wesley's spiritual influence converts a generation. Whitfield moves England and America towards an

activity which has never since ceased to operate. Fox instils into the minds of thousands throughout England faith in the Divine Spirit as dwelling evermore in man, and faith in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick as the essential elements of religion. There was with these prophets a motive strong enough to compel and sustain them. What was it? It was devotion to mankind—the loving of their neighbours as themselves.

We may glance at the annals of philanthropy. Oberlin, with a joyous willingness to endure all things, enters as its pastor upon the Ban de la Roche, among a people wretched, ignorant, a prey to laziness and hunger, without the merest necessities of life, and contented to remain so. In a few years he turns this wilderness into 'a garden of God,' and works in the people a change so remarkable that where ignorance and its never-failing attendants, cruelty, vice, poverty, reigned supreme,—piety, intelligence, meekness, and plenty hold triumphant sway. Charles Beckwith, reading a book on the Waldenses in the library of the Duke of Wellington, is seized with a desire to see for himself the

people of the Vaudois Valleys, finds them suffering all the evils of tyranny, throws himself into the work of their reformation, sparing neither time, strength, nor money in the effort to accomplish his mission. Chalmers goes into the largest, poorest, and most degraded parish of Glasgow, sweeps it clean of all poor-rates, workhouses, and public parish aid, and transforms it into what for its crushed poor is a Paradise. Guthrie rescues from starvation and ignorance thousands of the outcast children of the city streets, most of whom might have said, as one little girl among the two hundred and thirty children from his original Ragged School, in the funeral procession, was heard to say, 'He was all the father I ever knew.' Zeller, in the devotion of his life, redeems a race of outcasts in a German school; and Pestalozzi, in his wonder at the man's influence, says, 'What a power, what a power! I wish I could begin my life over again!' The power was in the love the man had. Howard, Elizabeth Fry, Sarah Martin, strong in hope and love, conquer selfishness and disgust, go into dens of indescribable foulness, and prove that even the most vicious are not beyond reclamation to the



ranks of humanity. Florence Nightingale leaves a lovely Derbyshire valley for the scenes of war's carnage, nurses the wounded brought in from the field of slaughter, diffusing among them a healing gladness, and winning from them a profound affection. Mary Carpenter spends her life for the neglected children of the lowest and most abandoned classes of her own country, and crosses the seas to elevate the women of India above the condition of 'things' to that of human beings. What was it that animated and upheld all these ministering spirits? It was an unquenchable love of man, and an unconquerable faith in man's salvability. To whom is it, then, that we are indebted for the better treatment of our criminals? To whom is it that we must ascribe the provision that is made for the suffering, the diseased, the destitute, the widow and the orphan? To whom is it that we owe the abolition of slavery? It is to men and women whose life-blood has been love for the human race, with whom sympathy with man was such a power, and such a passion, that it enabled them to work these noble deeds.

Then, again, when we consider the legisla-

tion of the last half-century, its predominating motives, its unquestioned bent, we find the same aim held aloft, and the same principle triumphing. Why has the legislation of the last fifty years been in the direction of destroying class distinctions? Why is it that the genius of English politics has been to uproot sectional privileges, and, instead of making war between classes, to bring them into reconciliation by a better understanding and a better appreciation of each other's interests? It is because statesmen have come to respect man as man, to learn that all real improvement, while it promotes, also springs out of, love to each other. Here is the motive sufficient for practical work. As long as men are divided into opposing camps, so long will our social and moral problems remain unsolved, our social sores continue open, and our social warfares be prolonged. But let our social relations be suffused, let the work of commerce and the conduct of legislation be pervaded, and let the ministrations of religion be permeated, by the spirit of brotherhood, and there will then be in operation an influence that will really mend the world.

# UNITARIAN AFFIRMATIONS.

By REV. W. COPELAND BOWIE.

## God.

*Unitarians Believe* in the Unity, Justice, and Love of God. This Faith is confirmed by Reason and Conscience, and by the deepest experiences of the noblest men who have ever lived.

## Jesus.

*Unitarians Believe* that the Gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, as taught by Jesus, is Religion at its highest and best. The true disciples of the Prophet of Nazareth are those who have faith in God, who possess pure hearts, and who lead useful lives.

## Bible.

*Unitarians Believe* that God spoke to man in olden times through Prophets,

Apostles, and Saints ; and that he continues to speak to every listening soul through the Order of the Universe, the Monitions of Conscience, the Words of the Wise, and the Example of the Good.

### Salvation.

*Unitarians Believe* that all who forsake their evil thoughts and deeds, who sincerely desire Divine inspiration and guidance, and who strive to live pure, unselfish lives, will be received into God's kingdom both here and hereafter.

### Science.

*Unitarians Believe* that the discoveries of Modern Science and the progress of Knowledge should bring joy, not dismay, to man's soul. As Errors and Superstitions are destroyed, a way is prepared for a nobler type of Religion.

### Heaven.

*Unitarians Believe* that God will provide a Higher Life and a Happier Home for ALL his children ; that somewhere, sometime, somehow, Truth will win the victory over falsehood, and Love will cast out all hate.

## THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

By JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

**I**N the Minister's morning sermon,  
He told of the primal fall,  
And how henceforth the wrath of God  
Rested on each and all:

And how of his will and pleasure,  
All souls, save a chosen few,  
Were doomed to eternal torture,  
And held in the way thereto.

Yet never by Faith's unreason,  
A saintlier soul was tried,  
And never the harsh old lesson,  
A tenderer heart belied.

And after the painful service,  
On that pleasant, bright First Day,  
He walked with his little daughter  
Through the apple bloom of May.

Sweet in the fresh green meadow,  
Sparrow and blackbird sung ;  
Above him their tinted petals  
The blossoming orchard hung.

Around in the wonderful glory,  
The Minister looked and smiled :  
' How good is the Lord who gives us  
These gifts from his hand, my child.

' Behold in the bloom of apples,  
And the violets in the sward,  
A hint of the old lost beauty  
Of the Garden of the Lord.'

Then upspoke the little maiden.  
Treading on snow and pink,  
' O, Father ! these pretty blossoms  
Are very wicked I think.

' Had there been no Garden of Eden,  
There had never been a fall,  
And if never a tree had blossomed  
God would have loved us all.'

' Hush, child !' the father answered,  
' By His decree man fell ;  
His ways are in clouds and darkness,  
But He doeth all things well.

‘And whether by His ordaining  
To us cometh good or ill,  
Joy or pain, or light or shadow,  
We must fear and love Him still.’

‘Oh I fear Him !’ said the daughter,  
‘And I try to love Him, too ;  
But I wish He was kind and gentle,  
Kind and loving as you.’

The Minister groaned in spirit,  
As the tremulous lips of pain,  
And wide, wet eyes uplifted,  
Questioned his own in vain.

Bowing his head he pondered  
The words of his little one :  
Had he erred in his life-long teachings,  
Had he wrong to his Master done ?

To what grim and dreadful idol,  
Had he lent the holiest name ?  
Did his own heart, loving and human,  
The God of his worship shame ?

And lo ! from the bloom and greenness,  
From the tender skies above,  
And the face of his little daughter,  
He read a lesson of love.

No more as the cloudy terror  
Of Sinai's mount of law,  
But as Christ in the Syrian lilies  
The vision of God he saw.

And as when in the clefts of Horeb,  
Of old was his presence known,  
The dread, ineffable glory,  
Was infinite goodness alone !

Thereafter his hearers noted  
In his prayers a tenderer strain,  
And never the message of hatred  
Burned in his lips again.

And the scoffing tongue was prayerful,  
And the blinded eyes found sight,  
And hearts as flint aforetime,  
Grew soft in his warmth and light.

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NOTE.—This short poem is published by the Unitarian Association because it so powerfully and tenderly illustrates and enforces an enlightened and generous faith in God as the Father and Friend of all his children.



# Tracts for the Times.

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